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Final Thoughts

Danielle Spurlock

Assistant Professor
Department of City and Regional Planning
The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

One of the great joys of teaching planning is that every student I have has a substantial experience to contribute. Each student can draw on his or her own experiences, be it living in rural areas in North Carolina or in St. Louis, Missouri, or in Guangszhou, China. Each student can contribute to a discussion about the built and sociopolitical environment, even if only by reflecting on how their travel behavior to class changes on a rainy day. Teaching places me at a unique point in a student's learning process. Not only am I able to introduce new material, but I am often present as an active participant when students begin to grapple with complex social problems.

Planners, in their daily work, confront social problems that demand the reconciliation of "ought" claims – normative, and often subjective, statements – as well as "is" claims – those rooted in empirical evidence (Goldstein, 1984: 303). In essence, this bifurcated argumentation means there is a role for both 1) the local knowledge that informs the ethical reasoning behind proposed goals and courses of action and 2) the technical information that helps describe the current state and anticipated consequences. It is within this collaborative framework that planners must facilitate the solicitation and synthesis of technical and local information from multiple parties with disparate values, beliefs, and goals.

> *Planners make claims. Planners' claims are public assertions that some set of actions should be taken. Planners submit their claims to an audience(s). The audience is that group of individuals who must pass judgment on the claim. These individuals take on the role of critical questioners. A forum exists for the planner to respond to the questions posed by the audience. For the audience to decide whether the claim is sound or well-founded, and thus entitled to be accepted, it will 'ask' the planner to make explicit the set of supporting reasons by which she can justify the claim (Goldstein, 1984: 297).*

In order to make plans and implement policies, programs, and projects, planners necessarily engage in an exchange with other agencies, elected officials, and the public to justify these actions. Differences in expertise and familiarity with technical concepts between planners and the audiences who are charged with making a critical assessment result in communicative difficulties. The translation necessary to bridge this communication gap depends on the skillful facilitation by planners who must bring together both 'ought' and 'is' claims without diminishing either.

Planners assimilate technical information from many disciplines (i.e., engineering, public administration, environmental protection) to produce our claims about current conditions, risks, and the potential tradeoffs of different courses of action. But planners are also charged with representing the ever-elusive "public interest" with many stakeholders who see both the "is" and "ought" the claims differently. Thus, the task of the next generations of planners is inherently collaborative. We must not only seek to identify, translate, and reconcile each community's vision, but we must do so in a sociopolitical environment where our empirical claims are in dispute. Our challenge as a faculty is to equip future planners with the necessary skill set to collaborate in the midst of conflict.

My role as an instructor includes sharing information and pushing students to observe their surroundings and interactions differently. I have an obligation to push students to think critically because, although my instructional approach draws on the students' own experiences, this next generation of planning professionals must be able to convince their audiences to question the universality of their own experience. They must "think all the way around" an issue to test the resilience of their positions to dissenting arguments because they must be able to articulate the necessity of planning to audiences unconvinced of the risks of inaction or the benefits of intervention. The next generation of planners must be able to craft arguments that anticipate the opposition's most robust criticisms and that can hold up under the weight of intense scrutiny because planning must balance current actions with future outcomes—the fundamental challenge placed at planners' feet. At the end of my first semester as a faculty member, I am more convinced than ever that both the faculty and students are equal to this challenge!